

A Research On The Relationship Between Organizational Silence And Burnout

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Abstract

Organizational silence and burnout are two of the most important organizational issues and both of them create obstacles for the development and survival of organizations. Organizational silence as opposite to organizational voice, is expressed as the state of employees being unable to declare their ideas on organizational matters freely. Dimensions of organizational silence examined with these three forms: acquiescent silence, defensive silence and prosocial silence. Burnout as a kind of job stress, is a syndrome caused by working interactively with other people. Dimensions of burnout examined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. In the first part of this study, literature review on organizational silence and burnout has been summarized. And then, in the second part, a quantitative research has been conducted on the administrative staff of a state university in Turkey to determine the relationship between organizational silence and burnout and to test the research model. According to the research results, some of the hypotheses were approved and some of them were rejected. Thus, the research model was partly supported.

Keywords: Organizational silence, burnout

Introduction

Organizational silence is defined as hiding information and knowledge about organizational issues and problems consciously and deliberately. And this is an obstruction for organizations to solve their problems and for development which they have to do in order to survive in today's competitive markets. Organizational silence as opposite to organizational voice, is expressed as the state of employees being unable to declare their ideas on organizational matters freely.

People always have to accommodate and develop themselves because of continuous changes in the working life. Trying to adapt constantly to economic conjuncture and competitive markets is difficult for some

employees and it is possible for them to feel stressed, unsuccessful and dissatisfied with their job. They even may feel ineligible themselves for their career and social lives that leads them to burnout. Burnout is defined as a syndrome caused by working interactively with other people and it consists of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. In other words, burnout is physical, emotional and mental exhaustion process which caused by being exposed to emotionally demanding situations in the long term.

The main aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between organizational silence and burnout with dimensional perspective. As expressed above, both of the concepts give rise to major problems for organizations, so it is important to execute the reasons behind them. In this context, literature review which includes the core concepts and dimensions has been accomplished in the first part. And then, a field research has been conducted by a quantitative research method.

Literature Review

Organizational Silence

Johannesen (1974), the author who described the silence at organizational level first, stated that “silence is withholding information by employees from others” He stresses that although silence is quite common in organizations, studying this concept is too hard because it is related with unexposed and unrevealed situations of human behaviour (Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2009; Fletcher and Watson, 2007). Silence is a concept hard to comprehend, which contains many emotions, thoughts and actions (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Core point of silence is that employees retain their opinion, view and thoughts at their own discrete. Silence usually begins at the point where a person fails to take a chance to face with challenge and then he prefers remaining speechless (Perlow and Williams, 2003).

In the management literature, there are two significant studies that established organizational silence phenomenon in today’s context. First of them is Morrison and Milliken (2000)’s research and in this research organizational silence is defined as a potentially dangerous impediment to organizational change and development and is likely to pose a significant obstacle to the development of truly pluralistic organizations. Morrison and Milliken's employees’ silence is based on two essential beliefs: the first one is that it is not worth to put in effort for the problems in the organizations. The second belief is that expressing opinions and views has dangerous consequences (Morrison and Milliken, 2000).

The second significant study in the management literature on organizational silence was conducted by Pinder and Harlos (2001); and mentioned silence as a reaction exhibited against unfair applications. Silence

is described as deliberately hiding of their thoughts, emotional and cognitive assessments about organizational requirements, unique expressions by individuals who realize that can affect or correct the change (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Bowen and Blackmon (2003) expressed as opposite to voice; and employees in expressing their opinions regarding organizational matters freely. Dyne et al. (2003) described organizational silence as keeping opinions and displeasures relate work under suppress or not to expose by employees on purpose. (Dyne et al. 2003; Slade, 2008). Organizational silence means hiding opinions, views and suggestions by employees consciously about any subject needed to be resolved. In the present study, forms of organizational silence developed by Dyne et al. (2003) are considered. Based on this classification, forms of organizational silence are acquiescent silence, defensive silence and prosocial silence.

Acquiescent Silence: Acquiescent silence means abstaining from sharing knowledge, feeling and opinion about current status because of dispensation of individuals. These individuals are indeed uninterested or unrelated with the current status (Dyne et al. 2003). They accept the prevailing circumstances and they are not inclined to speak, participate or spend effort to change current status. Employees exhibiting acquiescent silence behavior are not aware of existence of alternative options to alter these conditions since they acquiesce in conditions in their organization as is. Therefore, this type of silence has passive characteristic (Pinder and Harlos, 2001).

Defensive Silence: Morrison and Miliken (2000) emphasized that one of the key factors which presses employees in organization to remain silent is sense of fear. Steadily, defensive silence mentioned in Pinder and Harlos (2001)'s study, is considered as decision making not to speak because of employees are afraid of consequences of their word spoken to express their knowledge, opinions and thoughts. In the light of these, Dyne et al. (2003) described defensive silence as an action to protect themselves from threats associated with expressing their knowledge, opinions and thoughts because of their fears.

Prosocial Silence: Dyne et al. (2003) contributed the prosocial silence to the organizational silence literature and they mentioned that they developed prosocial silence behavior based on organizational citizenship behavior. Prosocial silence is described as withholding the ideas, thoughts, knowledge, opinions of employees about a subject for the sake of their organization and other employees by relying on principles of establishing cooperation and for benefit of their coworkers (Dyne et al., 2003). Regarding this silence form, it is essential not to share what they know for the sake of organization or others (Esfahani et al., 2013).

Burnout

Burnout is a problem observed frequently in today's working life and it was firstly began to be treated as a social problem in the 1970's. Freudenberger was the first scientist who described the concept as an "occupational hazard" (Sağlam, 2011). Freudenberger (1974: 159) defines burnout as *"to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources."* and then he adds *"it is a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by one's professional life"*. Another definition of the burnout is belong to Cherniss and he defines it as a negative conversion process of employees' attitudes and behaviours as a response to work-related stress (Cherniss, 1980). Burnout is a kind of job stress since it usually emerges as a result of dealing with clients. Although burnout has similar consequences with stress, it is different from stress as it is a situation arising from social interaction. In another saying, burnout is a chronic response to stressful working conditions which include so much interpersonal relations (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993). The most used definition of the concept has a dimensional perspective and stated as *"a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind"* (Maslach, 2003:2).

Most of the researchers prefer to handle the burnout with three dimensions of Maslach.

Burnout as a process is composed of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Even tough each dimension is a part of the process, they may be observed simultaneously. These dimensions are:

Emotional exhaustion: This is the key dimension of burnout which comes to mind firstly. Excessive workload and individual conflicts experienced in the work are the reasons of emotional exhaustion. Individuals who are emotionally exhausted feel tired out and they lack enough energy to start a new working day (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998).

Depersonalization: Individuals have negative attitudes toward other people related to his/her work at this process. Depersonalization means being distant from other people and acting negatively (Maslach et al., 2001). It is a response to emotional exhaustion and it may be seen as a way of coping with burnout when people just keep themselves away from others psychologically. However, if this divergency is too much, depersonalization will lead to callousness and cynicism (Deckard et al., 1994).

Reduced personal accomplishment: This dimension reflects the self-evaluation aspect of burnout (Maslach and Goldberg, 1998) and it signifies the reduction of individuals' efficiency and effectiveness at work. If

individuals feel themselves ineffective while working and communicating with others, it will be difficult for them to fulfil the requirements of the job. Feeling unsuccessful and incompetent may even lead to depression.

Methodology

Employees may feel worthless when they are or have to be silent about organizational problems. They can be depersonalized by thinking they do not have control over their work and this is one of the reasons of job stress and even burnout. Starting from this assumption, in terms of reducing the effectiveness of employee productivity and an administrative problem, the aim of this research is to measure the relationship between organizational silence and burnout. There are some studies on the subject of the relationship between two concepts. According to Aktaş and Şimşek's (2015) findings, there is a significant relationship between employees' silence and burnout levels. Similarly, Tahmasebi et al. (2013) report a positive relationship between organizational silence and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Also a significant correlation was found between these two concepts in the studies that have investigated the relationship between them on academicians (Kahya: 2015; Akın and Ulusoy: 2016). Based on these studies, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between organizational silence and burnout in the light of the following hypotheses. These terms were handled by a dimensional perspective. Thus, nine sub-hypotheses was designated to measure the relationship between the dimensions of organizational silence and burnout cases as both of the terms have three different dimensions as seen in the research model (see Figure 1). And research hypotheses are as follows:

H_{1a}: There is a positive correlation between acquiescent silence and emotional exhaustion.

H_{1b}: There is a positive correlation between acquiescent silence and depersonalization.

H_{1c}: There is a negative correlation between acquiescent silence and personal accomplishment.

H_{2a}: There is a positive correlation between defensive silence and emotional exhaustion.

H_{2b}: There is a positive correlation between defensive silence and depersonalization.

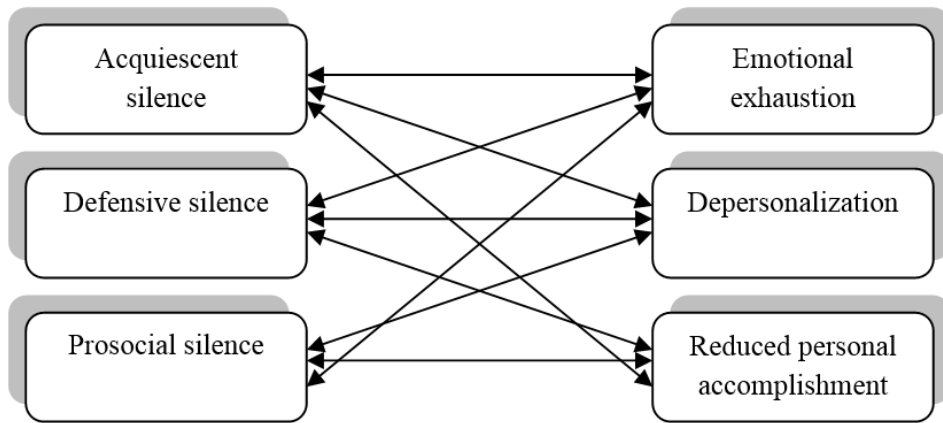
H_{2c}: There is a negative correlation between defensive silence and personal accomplishment.

H_{3a}: There is a positive correlation between prosocial silence and emotional exhaustion.

H_{3b}: There is a positive correlation between prosocial silence and depersonalization.

H_{3c}: There is a negative correlation between prosocial silence and personal accomplishment.

Figure 1: Research Model



Quantitative research method has been adopted in this study. Organizational silence scale developed by Dyne et al. (2003) with 15 expressions and burnout scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) with 22 expressions has been used for the field research. Those scales preferred because both of them have already been used by many researchers and their validity and reliability has been proved by other studies (Schutte et al., 2000; Schaufeli et al., 2001; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008; Morrison et al. 2011). Expressions used in scales are in the Likert format from "always" to "never".

The population of this research was the administrative staff of a state university in Turkey. 1548 staff was working there when the research was conducted and we had reached 20% of population by handing out 220 questionnaires. However, we gained 103 questionnaires back because some of the staff did not want to contribute to the research and some of them just forget to fill the forms.

Research results

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 17 has been used for the analysis of the data. First of all, the reliability of the data has been controlled by investigating the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. As both of them are above of 70% (see in Table 1), scales found reliable.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Organizational silence	,791	15
Burnout	,727	22

Descriptive analysis was conducted in order to find out the degree of organizational silence and burnout of the administrative staff. As seen in Table 2, acquiescent silence and defensive silence level is low (about 2 out of 5), but prosocial silence level is so high (above 4 out of 5). According to results, employees conceived that they rarely feel emotionally exhausted (2,23 out of 5) and almost never depersonalized (1,65 out of 5). And the personal accomplishment level is above the average (3,60 out of 5).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation
Acquiescent silence	2,3184	,80413
Defensive silence	2,0913	,76838
Prosocial silence	4,2621	,86411
Emotional exhaustion	2,2319	,72995
Depersonalization	1,6544	,60013
Personal Accomplishment	3,6019	,65766

Correlation analysis was conducted both to measure the correlations between dimensions and to test the hypotheses. According to the results, there are significant and positive correlations between acquiescent silence and depersonalization ($p=,022$; $r=,225$) and also between defensive silence and depersonalization ($p=,002$; $r=,296$). Thus, H_{1b} and H_{2b} hypotheses were approved. It means when acquiescent and defensive silence increase, depersonalization will increase too. Another result shows that both acquiescent and defensive silence are correlated significantly and negatively with personal accomplishment ($p=,006$; $r=-,270$ and $p=,007$; $r=-,264$). So, H_{1c} and H_{2c} hypotheses were also approved. This is the evidence of reverse correlation and increased silence reduces the feeling of personal accomplishment. The other dimensional correlations has been found insignificant and so other hypotheses (H_{1a} , H_{2a} , H_{3a} , H_{3b} , H_{3c}) were rejected. Correlatively, Ozturk Ciftci et al. (2015) did not detect a significant relationship between organizational silence and burnout and their dimensions in their studies among teachers.

One-way anova and t-tests conducted to determine if there is any significant relation between the dimensions of core concepts (organizational silence, burnout) and demographic variables. According to those analysis, there is not any significant relation between the dimensions of burnout and demographic variables. No relation has been found between dimensions of organizational silence and marital status or age variables. However, some significant relations has been discovered such as:

- There is a significant relation between acquiescent silence and educational status (The higher the level of education decreases acquiescent silence).

- There is a significant relation between prosocial silence and educational status (The higher the level of education increases prosocial silence).
- There is a significant relation between prosocial silence and gender (Women are more silent).

Table 3: Correlations

		1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3
Acquiescent silence (1.1)	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	103					
Defensive silence (1.2)	Pearson Correlation	,620**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000					
	N	103	103				
Prosocial silence (1.3)	Pearson Correlation	-,109	-,117	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,271	,238				
	N	103	103	103			
Emotional exhaustion (2.1)	Pearson Correlation	-,062	,066	,090	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,531	,505	,365			
	N	103	103	103	103		
Depersonalization (2.2)	Pearson Correlation	,225*	,296**	,108	,621**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,022	,002	,276	,000		
	N	103	103	103	103	103	
Personal accomplishment (2.3)	Pearson Correlation	-,270**	-,264**	,082	-,239*	-,357**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,006	,007	,411	,015	,000	
	N	103	103	103	103	103	103
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).							

Conclusion

When we consider the analysis results as a whole, we can say that there is not any correlation between organizational silence and emotional exhaustion. However, the correlation between two dimensions of organizational silence and two dimensions of burnout have been proved. Results showed that when organizational silence increases, depersonalization will increase and the personal accomplishment level will decrease. In this way, the research model has been partially approved.

Higher education lowers the silence, so the first suggestion of this research is about supporting and encouraging employees for higher education. Another suggestion is about to eliminate the gender

discrimination at work as the results showed women are more silent compared to men. Above all, employees should be encouraged by managers to participate in decision making process with some ways like brainstorming, nominal group decisions, multiple voting, Delphi technique and so on to break the wall of silence. Enhancement and dissemination of the number of such applications will help employees to decrease depersonalization and increase personal accomplishment.

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